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MEMORANDUM FOR: 

SUBJECT : Contribution to Survey of Latin America

1. Here are some ideas that may be of help in formulating the General Section of your Survey of Latin America.

2. One of the fundamental factors influencing nearly every aspect of the situation in Latin America is the highly egocentric nature of most individual Latin Americans. The traditional mode of operation for Latin American societies is the constant creation and dissolution of social organisms based on the loyalty of individuals for an outstanding personality. Latin American political groupings are almost completely tied to individuals and the primary loyalty of military forces is usually to key commanders as individuals rather than to the State or to an abstract ideal. As a result of this competition among groups oriented toward individual leaders, Latin American countries generally achieve stability only when there is one central leader who is clearly so powerful that he cannot be challenged, and submission by secondary leaders is not an admission of weakness on their part, or when there is a consensus among secondary leaders. This latter situation happens very seldom, however, and only in Uruguay has it been institutionalized to make it possible for a group of secondary leaders to conduct a relatively stable government without resort to dictatorship.

3. The constant ferment and jockeying for positions of political leadership goes on within a society whose major pattern was a rigid social and economic order inherited from colonial Spain and Portugal and reinforced by the universal Catholic Church which tended to support social order and the status quo. During the past 100 years or more the inherited cultural pattern has been broken down at a constantly accelerating pace by influences from abroad. The U.S. Constitutional model has been widely followed because it was the first successful revolution against the old European order and because democracy promises the maximum amount of freedom to the individual. This concept of freedom for the individual in turn has tremendous appeal to the egocentric Latin American. Until recently, however, the U. S. has had relatively little cultural or economic influence on most of Latin America. Only in certain countries in the Caribbean area has the U.S. been the dominating influence. In the remainder of Latin America

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France, French culture and French political thought have had a tremendous appeal. Italy, Germany, and opposition groups in Spain and Portugal have also had considerable influence, particularly on Latin American intellectuals. There is little real knowledge of the U.S. in Latin America, and little reason to like us.

4. The impact of ideas from abroad on Latin America, however, has been limited in a number of ways. The most important limiting factor has been the language barrier. Many important books widely read and understood in Europe and North America have never been translated into Spanish or Portuguese and often when they are translated the translation has occurred several years after the book has already had its impact in Europe and North America. Even if the language barrier is successfully crossed, however, books are relatively quite expensive in Latin America and their use is therefore confined to the very small proportion of the population that can afford to buy them. Books are so expensive that it is even difficult for the public school system in most Latin American countries to have an adequate supply of text books for the most basic subjects such as reading, history and arithmetic. As a result of this lack of access to books, conversation has become the main means for the communication of ideas among Latin Americans. University courses are based primarily on lectures by professors and call for very little research or library work. The professor's lecture notes in turn were probably based in part on the lectures he attended at the university and probably did not include material from many standard works common in European and North American universities. Outside of the university, coffee house conversations, political rallies or other social groups are the main forums in which the average Latin American obtains his basic understanding of politics, economics, social organization, etc. The obvious failures of his own government also frequently cause the Latin American to become pre-occupied with speculation about political and economic theory rather than with practical matters.

5. For about the past 40 years the communists have been at work in this situation along a number of lines calculated to give them increasing influence in Latin American society at large:

a. They present a doctrine calling for an all-powerful state to which the individual can readily give allegiance without loss of prestige.

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b. They promise to improve the lot of down-trodden individuals.

c. The native communist is trained and has the background to communicate his ideas orally and in person to the persons that he is trying to influence

d. The communists have promoted the distribution of large numbers of books dealing with various aspects of communism at low cost throughout Latin America. Communist book stores are seldom restricted to one title on a subject. There might be, for example, three different biographies of Lenin and half a dozen books explaining the theory of dialectic materialism. This creates the impression of variety and wide-spread interest in communist themes.

6. The past 30 years have seen an acceleration of change in Latin America. The depression of the 1930s advertised the importance of the U.S. to the economic well being of the rest of the World, and World War II caused a greater increase in US economic contact with Latin America at the expense of traditional European contacts (we still have relatively little cultural contact with much of Latin America). At about the same time improvements in sanitation and economic resources have permitted rapid increases in population growth. This increase in population growth has tended to absorb the increase in economic growth to such an extent that there has been relatively little improvement in the economic welfare of the average individual. During this same time radio and television have added their capability for transmitting ideas rapidly and have increased the impact of unfulfilled ambitions on Latin American populations at large. In this era of political instability and unresolved economic problems the communist campaign has exerted a constant pressure. Every time a new solution is tried and fails and every time a new leader rises and falls it makes the untried communist alternative appear more and more worth trying. At the same time an entire generation of intellectuals has been strongly influenced by Marxist thinking. Even the strongest anti-communist intellectuals in Latin America are heavily dependent on Marxist vocabulary and concepts for their explanation of their theories.

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7. The egocentrism of the Latin American makes him very conscious of power, and the power and obvious success of the U.S. have had and continue to have great influence in Latin America. As the Soviet economy has grown, however, and as the Soviets advertise Soviet power with their missile and space achievements they have added the appeal of a powerful and successful Soviet Union to the already powerful impact of Communist propaganda and political concepts.

8. The current wave of interest in guerrilla warfare is likely to strike a responsive chord in Latin America. The Latins are frequently action-oriented, and their grouping around personal leaders can be ideal for certain types of guerrilla operations (after all the word "guerrilla" came from the Spanish). There is still a great deal of geography in Latin America suitable for guerrilla operations and the Mao concept of victory through guerrilla operations, as propagandized by Castro, offers real promise to the emotional, activist, Latin American revolutionary.

9. I do not mean by the foregoing to say that Latin America will ~~inevitably~~ go Communist. There are many traditional influences opposed to Communism and many current factors as well. On balance, however, I believe that communism may well continue to gain in strength in Latin America and that we will have more serious problems in that area before we can reverse the trend.

WILLIAM A. TIDWELL
Assistant to DD/I (Planning)

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